

through non-VA providers. It would give those who live the furthest from VA facilities the choice to receive care closer to home at a local hospital or physician's office. To qualify, a veteran must live at least 60 miles from a VA clinic, 120 miles from a VA hospital or 240 miles from a VA specialized care facility when seeking that care. To ensure continuity of care, the legislation would require VA to develop the functional capability to exchange veterans' medical information between VA and non-VA providers in the pilot. The VA will be required to annually report to Congress on cost, quality, and patient satisfaction.

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 1527.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1527, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the yeas have it.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

#### VETERANS' COMPENSATION COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT ACT OF 2008

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill (S. 2617) to increase, effective as of December 1, 2008, the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans.

The Clerk read the title of the Senate bill.

The text of the Senate bill is as follows:

S. 2617

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

#### SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2008".

#### SEC. 2. INCREASE IN RATES OF DISABILITY COMPENSATION AND DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION.

(a) RATE ADJUSTMENT.—Effective on December 1, 2008, the Secretary of Veterans Af-

fairs shall increase, in accordance with subsection (c), the dollar amounts in effect on November 30, 2008, for the payment of disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation under the provisions specified in subsection (b).

(b) AMOUNTS TO BE INCREASED.—The dollar amounts to be increased pursuant to subsection (a) are the following:

(1) WARTIME DISABILITY COMPENSATION.—Each of the dollar amounts under section 1114 of title 38, United States Code.

(2) ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION FOR DEPENDENTS.—Each of the dollar amounts under section 1115(1) of such title.

(3) CLOTHING ALLOWANCE.—The dollar amount under section 1162 of such title.

(4) DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION TO SURVIVING SPOUSE.—Each of the dollar amounts under subsections (a) through (d) of section 1311 of such title.

(5) DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION TO CHILDREN.—Each of the dollar amounts under sections 1313(a) and 1314 of such title.

(c) DETERMINATION OF INCREASE.—

(1) PERCENTAGE.—Except as provided in paragraph (2), each dollar amount described in subsection (b) shall be increased by the same percentage as the percentage by which benefit amounts payable under title II of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 401 et seq.) are increased effective December 1, 2008, as a result of a determination under section 215(i) of such Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)).

(2) ROUNDING.—Each dollar amount increased under paragraph (1), if not a whole dollar amount, shall be rounded to the next lower whole dollar amount.

(d) SPECIAL RULE.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may adjust administratively, consistent with the increases made under subsection (a), the rates of disability compensation payable to persons under section 10 of Public Law 85-857 (72 Stat. 1263) who have not received compensation under chapter 11 of title 38, United States Code.

(e) PUBLICATION OF ADJUSTED RATES.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall publish in the Federal Register the amounts specified in subsection (b), as increased under that subsection, not later than the date on which the matters specified in section 215(i)(2)(D) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)(2)(D)) are required to be published by reason of a determination made under section 215(i) of such Act during fiscal year 2009.

#### SEC. 3. CODIFICATION OF 2007 COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT IN RATES OF DISABILITY COMPENSATION AND DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION.

(a) VETERANS' DISABILITY COMPENSATION.—Section 1114 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in subsection (a), by striking "\$115" and inserting "\$117";

(2) in subsection (b), by striking "\$225" and inserting "\$230";

(3) in subsection (c), by striking "\$348" and inserting "\$356";

(4) in subsection (d), by striking "\$501" and inserting "\$512";

(5) in subsection (e), by striking "\$712" and inserting "\$728";

(6) in subsection (f), by striking "\$901" and inserting "\$921";

(7) in subsection (g), by striking "\$1,135" and inserting "\$1,161";

(8) in subsection (h), by striking "\$1,319" and inserting "\$1,349";

(9) in subsection (i), by striking "\$1,483" and inserting "\$1,517";

(10) in subsection (j), by striking "\$2,471" and inserting "\$2,527";

(11) in subsection (k)—

(A) by striking "\$89" both places it appears and inserting "\$91"; and

(B) by striking "\$3,075" and "\$4,313" and inserting "\$3,145" and "\$4,412", respectively;

(12) in subsection (l), by striking "\$3,075" and inserting "\$3,145";

(13) in subsection (m), by striking "\$3,392" and inserting "\$3,470";

(14) in subsection (n), by striking "\$3,860" and inserting "\$3,948";

(15) in subsections (o) and (p), by striking "\$4,313" each place it appears and inserting "\$4,412";

(16) in subsection (r), by striking "\$1,851" and "\$2,757" and inserting "\$1,893" and "\$2,820", respectively; and

(17) in subsection (s), by striking "\$2,766" and inserting "\$2,829".

(b) ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION FOR DEPENDENTS.—Section 1115(1) of such title is amended—

(1) in subparagraph (A), by striking "\$139" and inserting "\$142";

(2) in subparagraph (B), by striking "\$240" and "\$70" and inserting "\$245" and "\$71", respectively;

(3) in subparagraph (C), by striking "\$94" and "\$70" and inserting "\$96" and "\$71", respectively;

(4) in subparagraph (D), by striking "\$112" and inserting "\$114";

(5) in subparagraph (E), by striking "\$265" and inserting "\$271"; and

(6) in subparagraph (F), by striking "\$222" and inserting "\$227".

(c) CLOTHING ALLOWANCE FOR CERTAIN DISABLED VETERANS.—Section 1162 of such title is amended by striking "\$662" and inserting "\$677".

(d) DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION FOR SURVIVING SPOUSES.—

(1) NEW LAW DIC.—Section 1311(a) of such title is amended—

(A) in paragraph (1), by striking "\$1,067" and inserting "\$1,091"; and

(B) in paragraph (2), by striking "\$228" and inserting "\$233".

(2) OLD LAW DIC.—The table in paragraph (3) of such section is amended to read as follows:

"Pay grade	Monthly rate	Pay grade	Monthly rate
E-1 .....	\$1,091	W-4 .....	\$1,305
E-2 .....	\$1,091	O-1 .....	\$1,153
E-3 .....	\$1,091	O-2 .....	\$1,191
E-4 .....	\$1,091	O-3 .....	\$1,274
E-5 .....	\$1,091	O-4 .....	\$1,349
E-6 .....	\$1,091	O-5 .....	\$1,485
E-7 .....	\$1,129	O-6 .....	\$1,674
E-8 .....	\$1,191	O-7 .....	\$1,808
E-9 .....	\$1,242	O-8 .....	\$1,985
W-1 .....	\$1,153	O-9 .....	\$2,123
W-2 .....	\$1,198	O-10 .....	\$2,328

“Pay grade	Monthly rate	Pay grade	Monthly rate
W-3 .....	\$1,234		

<sup>1</sup> If the veteran served as sergeant major of the Army, senior enlisted advisor of the Navy, chief master sergeant of the Air Force, sergeant major of the Marine Corps, or master chief petty officer of the Coast Guard, at the applicable time designated by section 1302 of this title, the surviving spouse's rate shall be \$1,342.

<sup>2</sup> If the veteran served as Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Chief of Staff of the Army, Chief of Naval Operations, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, Commandant of the Marine Corps, or Commandant of the Coast Guard, at the applicable time designated by section 1302 of this title, the surviving spouse's rate shall be \$2,499.”

(3) ADDITIONAL DIC FOR CHILDREN OR DISABILITY.—Section 1311 of such title is amended—

(A) in subsection (b), by striking “\$265” and inserting “\$271”;

(B) in subsection (c), by striking “\$265” and inserting “\$271”; and

(C) in subsection (d), by striking “\$126” and inserting “\$128”.

(e) DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION FOR CHILDREN.—

(1) DIC WHEN NO SURVIVING SPOUSE.—Section 1313(a) of such title is amended—

(A) in paragraph (1), by striking “\$452” and inserting “\$462”;

(B) in paragraph (2), by striking “\$649” and inserting “\$663”;

(C) in paragraph (3), by striking “\$846” and inserting “\$865”; and

(D) in paragraph (4), by striking “\$846” and “\$162” and inserting “\$865” and “\$165”, respectively.

(2) SUPPLEMENTAL DIC FOR CERTAIN CHILDREN.—Section 1314 of such title is amended—

(A) in subsection (a), by striking “\$265” and inserting “\$271”;

(B) in subsection (b), by striking “\$452” and inserting “\$462”; and

(C) in subsection (c), by striking “\$225” and inserting “\$230”.

(f) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall take effect on December 1, 2007.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) and the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MORAN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2008, and I want to especially thank Congressman CIRO RODRIGUEZ of Texas for his sponsorship of the House bill, which was H.R. 5826.

I am pleased that we are here today working with the Senate to get the bill passed. After passage here today, the bill goes directly to the White House for the President's signature, and this will ensure that our veterans will not be delayed in getting their cost-of-living adjustment.

Since 1976, Congress has passed a measure to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to increase the rates of basic compensation for disabled veterans and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation, referred to as DIC, to their survivors and dependents, along with other benefits, in order to keep pace with the rising cost of living.

This disability COLA would become effective on December 1 of this year and will be equal to that provided on an annual basis to Social Security re-

cipients. It will benefit over 3 million disabled veterans from the World War I era through the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan that VA estimates will be receiving this compensation in FY 09. It will also help over 300,000 of their survivors during the same period.

Many of the 3.5 million recipients of these benefits depend upon these tax-free payments not only to provide for their own basic needs, but those of their spouses and their children and often parents as well. Without an annual COLA, these veterans and their families would see the value of their hard-earned benefits slowly erode. We would be derelict in our duty as a Congress if we failed to guarantee that those who sacrificed so much for this country received benefits and services that keep pace with their necessities. The veterans compensation COLA is included in the CBO baseline, which means in English that we have already paid for this COLA.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MORAN of Kansas. Mr. Speaker, I am a supporter of S. 2617, the Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2008. On May 21 of this year, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 5826, the Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Act of 2008, introduced by our colleague, the gentleman from Texas, Mr. RODRIGUEZ.

The legislation before us today is the Senate companion to that bill. It would increase, effective December 1, 2008, the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans.

I would like to thank the gentleman from California, the chairman, Mr. FILNER, and the ranking member, the gentleman from Indiana, Mr. BUYER, for bringing this bill to the floor in a timely manner, and acknowledge the efforts by our colleagues, the Chairman of the Subcommittee, Mr. HALL, and the ranking member, Mr. LAMBORN, for their work and leadership on improving benefits for our veterans.

The legislation before us is an important annual authorization which provides our Nation's veterans with a timely increase in their compensation later this year. It was requested by the Bush administration, and the House passage today will send this bill to the President to be signed into law.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage my colleagues to support this bill.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the sponsor of the House version of the bill, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ).

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for this opportunity to speak regarding S. 2617. Thank you, Chairman FILNER, for your leadership, and also Chairman HALL, the ranking minority member, Mr. BUYER, and Mr. MORAN. Thank you very much.

As a sponsor of H.R. 5826, the House version of this important piece of legislation, I am extremely proud to have had the opportunity to be here today. The House unanimously passed this bill on the 21st of May earlier this year.

We are all keenly aware of the burden our current economy places upon American families and the situation that we find ourselves in now with the economy. These same difficulties are magnified with our veterans and their families who rely on disability compensation provided through the Senate bill, S. 2617, the Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2008. It seeks to address these challenges by increasing the compensation rates in line with the Consumer Price Index for the Social Security COLA.

We now have an opportunity to send a bill to the President that will have a direct impact on countless veterans, over 3 million, and also their survivors and families.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak today during consideration of S. 2617, the companion bill to H.R. 5826. I ask for its support by the House.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of S. 2617, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2008.

Each year, the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs bring before Congress legislation to adjust the compensation our veterans receive through the cost-of-living adjustment. Our Nation's veterans have sacrificed so much for this country, and we fulfill our obligation to them by providing this annual adjustment to their benefits to help them keep up with the cost-of-living. The House already passed H.R. 5826 on May 21, 2008. The bill before us is the Senate version of that same bill.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation will provide our veterans an increase in their wartime disability compensation, additional compensation for benefits, clothing allowance, dependency and indemnity compensation to surviving spouses, and dependency and indemnity compensation to children. This is an important “must-pass” bill, which will ensure our veterans receive the increase to their benefits on time.

I would like to thank Chairman FILNER, as well as Disability and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee Chairman JOHN HALL, and Ranking Member DOUG LAMBORN for their efforts to bring this bill to the House floor in an expeditious manner. Our action on this bill today will be the final action before the bill is presented to the President for signature, and I encourage all my colleagues to support passage of S. 2617, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2008.

Mr. HALL of New York. Mr. Speaker, I rise, today in support of S. 2617, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act. With today's military and veteran community facing increasing deployments, a struggling economy, rising gas prices, and other hardships that together create tough financial situations, this legislation could not have come at a better time.

For many of our Nation's veterans and their families, these payments are a necessity in order to make ends meet. They provide for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the survivors of certain disabled veterans. Specifically, this COLA increase will boost wartime disability compensation, additional compensation for benefits, and even things such as clothing allowances.

Again, in these increasingly tough times, we cannot allow rising costs to strip our brave veterans of this crucial resource. For those who have done so much by sacrificing mind, body, and family in service of this Nation, this COLA is the least we can do to honor their sacrifices.

I commend Senator AKAKA for his hard work passing this crucially needed legislation through the Senate, and urge my colleagues to pass this in the House with equal success.

Mr. MORAN of Kansas. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I would ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on S. 2617.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to unanimously support it and yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, S. 2617.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the yeas have it.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

#### VETERANS' PROGRAMS EXTENSION AND CONSTRUCTION AUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2008

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill

(H.R. 6832) to authorize major medical facility projects and major medical facility leases for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2009, to extend certain authorities of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 6832

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

#### SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the "Veterans' Programs Extension and Construction Authorization Act of 2008".

(b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.

#### TITLE I—AUTHORIZATION OF MEDICAL FACILITY PROJECTS AND MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY LEASES

Sec. 101. Authorization for fiscal year 2009 major medical facility projects.

Sec. 102. Modification of authorization amounts for certain major medical facility construction projects previously authorized.

Sec. 103. Authorization of fiscal year 2009 major medical facility leases.

Sec. 104. Authorization of construction of major medical facility, Okaloosa County, Florida.

Sec. 105. Authorization of appropriations.

Sec. 106. Report on facilities administration.

Sec. 107. Annual report on outpatient clinics.

#### TITLE II—EXTENSION OF CERTAIN AUTHORITIES

Sec. 201. Repeal of sunset on inclusion of noninstitutional extended care services in definition of medical services.

Sec. 202. Extension of recovery audit authority.

Sec. 203. Permanent authority for provision of hospital care, medical services, and nursing home care to veterans who participated in certain chemical and biological testing conducted by the Department of Defense.

Sec. 204. Extension of expiring collections authorities.

Sec. 205. Extension of nursing home care.

Sec. 206. Extension of authority to carry out income verification.

Sec. 207. Permanent authority to establish research corporations.

Sec. 208. Extension of certain veterans home loan guaranty programs.

Sec. 209. Extension of requirement to submit annual report on the Special Committee on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Sec. 210. Extension of requirement to submit annual report on the Committee on Care of Severely Chronically Mentally Ill Veterans.

Sec. 211. Permanent requirement for biannual report on Women's Advisory Committee.

Sec. 212. Permanent authority for Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans.

Sec. 213. Extension of temporary increase in maximum loan guaranty amount for certain housing loans guaranteed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

#### TITLE III—OTHER MATTERS

Sec. 301. Increase in cap of number of veterans participating in independent living program.

Sec. 302. Enhancement of refinancing of home loans by veterans.

Sec. 303. Technical amendments.

#### TITLE I—AUTHORIZATION OF MEDICAL FACILITY PROJECTS AND MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY LEASES

##### SEC. 101. AUTHORIZATION FOR FISCAL YEAR 2009 MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY PROJECTS.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may carry out the following major medical facility projects in fiscal year 2009 in the amount specified for each project:

(1) Seismic corrections, Building 2, at the Department of Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System, Palo Alto Division Palo Alto, California, in an amount not to exceed \$54,000,000.

(2) Construction of a polytrauma healthcare and rehabilitation center at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, San Antonio, Texas, in an amount not to exceed \$66,000,000.

(3) Seismic corrections, Building 1, at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, San Juan, Puerto Rico, in an amount not to exceed \$225,900,000.

##### SEC. 102. MODIFICATION OF AUTHORIZATION AMOUNTS FOR CERTAIN MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS PREVIOUSLY AUTHORIZED.

(a) MODIFICATION OF MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY AUTHORIZATIONS.—Section 801(a) of the Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act of 2006 (Public Law 109-461) is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1)—

(A) by striking "\$300,000,000" and inserting "\$625,000,000"; and

(B) by striking the second sentence; and

(2) in paragraph (3), by striking "\$98,000,000" and inserting "\$769,200,000".

(b) MODIFICATION OF AUTHORIZATION FOR CERTAIN MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS PREVIOUSLY AUTHORIZED IN CONNECTION WITH CAPITAL ASSET REALIGNMENT INITIATIVE.—

(1) CORRECTION OF PATIENT PRIVACY DEFICIENCIES AT THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL CENTER, GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA.—Paragraph (5) of section 802 of the Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act of 2006 (Public Law 109-461) is amended by striking "\$85,200,000" and inserting "\$136,700,000".

(2) CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW MEDICAL CENTER FACILITY AT THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL CENTER, LAS VEGAS, NEVADA.—Paragraph (7) of such section is amended by striking "\$406,000,000" and inserting "\$600,400,000".

(3) CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW OUTPATIENT CLINIC, LEE COUNTY, FLORIDA.—Paragraph (8) of such section is amended—

(A) by striking "ambulatory" and all that follows through "purchase," and inserting "outpatient clinic in"; and

(B) by striking "\$65,100,000" and inserting "\$131,800,000".

(4) CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW MEDICAL CENTER FACILITY, ORLANDO, FLORIDA.—Paragraph (11) of such section is amended by striking "\$377,700,000" and inserting "\$656,800,000".

(5) CONSOLIDATION OF CAMPUSES AT THE UNIVERSITY DRIVE AND H. JOHN HEINZ III DIVISIONS, PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA.—Paragraph (12) of such section is amended by striking "\$189,205,000" and inserting "\$295,600,000".

##### SEC. 103. AUTHORIZATION OF FISCAL YEAR 2009 MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY LEASES.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may carry out the following major medical facility leases in fiscal year 2009 at the locations specified, and in an amount for each lease not to exceed the amount shown for such location: